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THE AMERICAN CONGRESS OF
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND
HISTORY AT BUENOS AIRES

BY

CHARLES E. CHAPMAN

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ON July 9, 1816, a formal declaration of independence of the Spanish colonies of the Rio de la Plata was made, by a congress in session at Tucumán. In consequence, a series of celebrations was organized in Argentina for the month of July, 1916, in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the declaration of Tucumán, and as part of the programme a number of congresses, embracing a variety of subjects, such as the congress "of the child", that of social science, and many others, were held. One of these congresses was the one with which it is proposed to deal in this article.

It is open to question whether any other congress of the centenary accomplished more of real value than did the American Congress of Bibliography and History. Its success was due in large measure to the untiring efforts through two years of the organizer of the congress, Dr. Nicanor Sarmiento, member of the distinguished family of the former president of that name, and to the extremely efficient direction of the congress by its presiding officer, Dr. David Peña, founder of the Ateneo Nacional of the Argentine Republic, and one of the leading intellectual luminaries of South America. Of no small importance, too, was the fact that the congress, held its meetings at the Ateneo Nacional in Buenos Aires, instead of going to Tucumán, thus being free to devote its time to business, rather than to the round of ceremonies which formed a delightful, but somewhat too diverting, feature of the exercises at Tucumán. The congress began its sessions on July 5, and, except for July 9, met every day, often morning, afternoon, and night, until July 14, a supplementary meeting taking place the night of July 18. One day was given over to an excursion to the city of La Plata, but all the other meetings were confined to business. Historical and bibliographical papers were not read in open session, but were referred respectively to two committees, and summaries only were submitted to the congress. Thus a vast amount of time was saved, which was utilized to the full, for the business proper of the congress.

The congress was attended by 225 delegates representing institutions in almost every country of the Americas. As was to be expected, however, the greater number came from Argentina. The delegates represented a wide variety of interests, not only historians proper but also bibliographers, librarians, teachers, and men who

were none of these, but who were interested in the subject-matter, being among those in attendance. National delegates were present from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, San Salvador, Spain, and Uruguay. The writer of this article was formal representative of the University of California, but was accorded the privileges and recognition of a national delegate. During the greater part of the meetings he was the only North American present, but in the closing days of the congress, Dr. William S. Robertson, whose boat was late, arrived as representative of the University of Illinois. It was unfortunate that more North Americans could not have been present, although the writer feels justified in saying that the mere presence of one, and at length two, was not without its effect in the deliberations of the sessions. Other North American universities which signified their adhesion to the congress were the following: Cornell, Chicago, Harvard, Louisiana, Minnesota, Tulane, and Yale. The following institutions did likewise: Academy of Political Science of Philadelphia, American Association for International Peace, American Historical Association, Library of Congress, Pan-American Union, and Smithsonian Institution.

The most important business concerned the organization of the congress as a permanent body, and the founding of a bibliographical institute, both measures being prepared by a special committee of which the writer was a member. A permanent council of the congress was established, and provision was made for a meeting of the congress at least once every three years, although the intention is that it shall take place every year. The next meeting is to be held at Montevideo on August 16, 1917, that date being the national holiday of the Republic of Uruguay. The founding of the Institute calls for more extended comment.

The American Institute of Bibliography was founded, and the Ateneo Nacional of Buenos Aires was named the central and directing body, that society having already accumulated a considerable fund for this very purpose. It aims to get together the most ample data concerning books and articles about the Americas or by citizens of any of the American republics, and to supply such information, at moderate prices, to any who may desire it. The central institution plans to publish a monthly bibliographical review, charging from 12 to 15 pesos (\$5 or \$6) for an annual subscription. It also proposes to edit works, publish documents, make translations of notable works, prepare catalogues and guides of archives, and acquire and exchange books. It was decided to recommend to the

governments and important intellectual societies of the Americas that local bibliographical institutes be founded, subordinate in a measure to the Ateneo Nacional of the Argentine Republic, with a view to uniformity of objects and methods, the subordinate institutes maintaining correspondence with the central institute. Dr. David Peña was named president of the Institute of the Ateneo Nacional.

Although the programme of the Institute is exceedingly broad, the writer is confident that a practical result of value to North American students may be obtained. This opinion he bases on the exceptional executive ability and scholarship of Dr. Peña, and on the beginning that has already been made by the Ateneo Nacional on its own account.

Of the other business of the congress the following resolutions embodied what is perhaps of most interest to North American scholars :

That the bibliographical reviews now in existence and those which may be founded be urged to publish descriptions of archives of the Americas, indicating the principal divisions of documents, their state of preservation, the means facilitated for their use, and any further information of service to the investigator.

That the national and local governments of the Americas be urged to publish documents concerning the history of the two continents, and the catalogues of their archives, sending a copy of such publications to the bibliographical institute of the Ateneo Nacional of the Argentine Republic.

That steps be taken to urge the publication of national bibliographies on a similar plan, with a view to an eventual bibliography of the Americas. (The scholarly proposer of this resolution, Señor Díaz Pérez, chief of the Biblioteca Nacional of Asunción, has already prepared a select bibliography for Paraguay which will shortly be published.)

That, with a view to a broader mutual understanding between the various countries of the Americas, the congress declares itself in favor of an exchange of professors between North America (the United States) and the Latin American countries, and of the latter among themselves; and of a formal exchange of students between the said countries.

That institutions be urged to send copies of their publications to the Ateneo Nacional of Buenos Aires, and to exchange publications among themselves.

That, in the same manner, the exchange of bibliographical catalogues, whether in book form or in pamphlet, be encouraged.

That a special prize be awarded for the best bibliographical work presented at each succeeding meeting of the congress.

That the proceedings of the present congress be compiled and published in book form. It is planned to include in this volume some of the shorter bibliographical and historical articles of outstanding merit among the many presented to the congress.

In connection with the congress, throughout the sessions, there was an exposition "of the book". Many institutions, including some from North America, sent works for this exposition. Three were specially noteworthy for their amplitude and value, those of the University of Córdoba (Argentina), the Biblioteca Nacional of Asunción, and the private collection of Señor Corbacho of Lima. The last-named consisted of manuscripts from the period of the *conquistadores* to the end of Spanish rule, a truly extraordinary and voluminous collection; and if there are many more of the same type in Lima, that city ought to become an attractive centre for the investigator who goes to the sources.

CHARLES E. CHAPMAN.

